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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 004309

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SUBJECT: FRANCE PREPARING TO ANNOUNCE NEW AFRICA POLICY

REF: A. PARIS 4271

[1](#)B. PARIS 4069

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, 1.4 (b/d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: France is planning to announce a major shift in its Africa policy, to be unveiled by President Sarkozy during his scheduled visit to South Africa in February 2008, according to Romain Serman, an AF-advisor at the French Presidency. The change in policy is intended to minimize, if not eliminate, vestiges of the colonial era that continue to cloud France's relations with much of the continent, and may also affect France's military deployments in Africa. The policy change is consistent with Sarkozy's efforts to conduct France's relations on a more modern and business-like footing, according to Serman. Sarkozy will also visit Angola and DRC when he travels to South Africa. Serman acknowledged that the new policy could face resistance among traditionalists in both France and Africa. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) During an October 16 discussion focused mainly on Darfur-related issues (ref A). Romain Serman, an AF-advisor at the French Presidency, confided that President Sarkozy intends to announce a major shift in France's Africa policy during a trip to South Africa planned for February 2008. The speech is likely to take place during a session of South Africa's parliament. This shift, Serman explained, would elaborate on themes Sarkozy expressed during the speech on Africa he delivered in Dakar on July 26, 2007, not long after taking office.

(Full text of speech in French available at:
www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/francais/inter_ventions/2007/allocation_a_l_universite_de_dakar.79184.html, or e-mail kanedarj@state.gov for a copy.)

MINIMIZING THE EFFECTS OF THE PAST

[1](#)3. (C) Serman said that France's relations with Africa, and specifically with its former colonies, has long been marred by sentiments and sensitivities on both sides stemming from the colonial era. On the one hand, France has wanted to avoid appearing paternalistic and condescending but at the same time has found it difficult to resist intervening, sometimes brusquely, when its own interests have been at stake or when Africans in difficulty have plainly needed outside help. Africans have understandably placed a high value on their independence and do not hesitate to assert it when they can, but continue to ask France (and other members of the international community) for help, often exploiting residual Western guilt. The result, in Serman's analysis, has been a contortion of Franco-African relations, a cycle difficult to break.

¶4. (C) Serman said that Sarkozy, consistent with his image of seeking to do business at arms length will all concerned, wants to do away with this historical and unproductive baggage and thus allow France and its African partners to treat with each other on an open and straight-up basis. Serman said that Sarkozy was tired of France's having to pull its punches occasionally because of concerns over historical sensitivities. Sarkozy understands these sensitivities but believes that using the past as both a sword and shield is unproductive for Africans and often hypocritical. As Sarkozy stated in Dakar, it is time for both sides to acknowledge the positive and negative elements of all that has gone before, learn from those experiences, and begin treating each other more as equals, subject to the same rules.

¶5. (C) One area that Sarkozy will stress is the right of donor countries to insist on transparency in accounting for how aid is used and distributed, and to ensure that the intended recipient receives the aid, rather than to see it disappear into a host country official's pocket. Serman said that Africans have consistently protested against French requirements that they account for French aid, but he said that Sarkozy believes that France, and its tax-paying citizens, have a legitimate right to know that their contributions are being used as intended. Serman said that Sarkozy would remain firm on this point.

¶6. (C) Asked whether France's new approach would encourage Africans to draw closer to China, which is known for its "non-interference" policy, Serman said that Sarkozy addressed this issue during a banquet in Libreville, Gabon, shortly after the Dakar speech. President Bongo had organized an elaborate banquet for Sarkozy, with over 1,000 people attending. In his remarks, Sarkozy said that Africa "should

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be open to all investors and those seeking to do business in Africa. Everyone should be welcome -- Americans, French, other Europeans, and of course China. But the same rules should apply to all. This is what France is seeking on behalf of all non-Africans wanting to do business in Africa."

MILITARY ISSUES

¶8. (C) Serman, without going into detail, said that the policy shift would likely include changes to France's military presence in Africa, even though France has been realigning its military hubs (Senegal, Gabon, Djibouti, Reunion), with deployments in Chad, Togo, C.A.R., and Cote d'Ivoire). He refrained from providing details but said that France's military in Africa could receive a new set of missions and functions that could in turn require a different distribution of forces. When pressed, Serman said that consideration of these issues was ongoing and would develop in due course.

VISITS TO ANGOLA AND DRC

¶9. (C) In addition to traveling to South Africa, Sarkozy also plans to visit Angola and DRC. The visit to Angola will build on recent contact between Sarkozy and President Dos Santos in New York on the margins of the UNGA and on indications that the two sides are willing to explore improving relations (ref B).

IS THE "NEW" POLICY REALLY GOING TO BE "NEW?"

¶10. (C) We reminded Serman that over the years, the French have periodically announced a "new" policy for Africa. Some of these initiatives have led to changes, but in many respects much of the old "francafrique" model has remained. Did Serman expect that Sarkozy's "new" policy would achieve significantly more than other attempts at reform? Serman acknowledged the point but said that he and others at the Presidency were confident that Sarkozy was committed to

change and that his ideas could bear fruit. Serman pointed to Sarkozy's Dakar speech as an example of Sarkozy's willingness to state his points directly and to avoid sugar-coating them, even though he knew they would stir controversy. Serman stressed that Sarkozy wanted to break the "love-hate" cycle between France and Africa and replace it with something more on the order of "mutual respect-mutual transparency." He admitted that the task would not necessarily be simple, with many in both France and Africa wedded to the traditional ways of francafrique But Sarkozy is committed to his approach and intends to express his views clearly when he addresses South Africans in February.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

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